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SUBJECT: GOG CHANGES SECURITY DETAIL OF HUMAN RIGHTS
DEFENDERS

¶1. On April 24, the Guatemalan government announced that the Presidential Secretariat of Security and Administrative Affairs (SAAS) will no longer provide personal security to private citizens, including human rights defenders, who are not affiliated with the government. National Civil Police (PNC) agents from the Division of Personal Protection will instead be assigned to protect those individuals. (Note: Ambassadors also receive security from the PNC.)

¶2. Among many others, the decision affects prominent human rights defenders, including Helen Mack, President of the Myrna Mack Foundation and co-petitioner in 29 cases of forced disappearances and other crimes before the Inter-American Court of Human Rights. Mack was assigned two presidential security guards in 2002 by order of then Vice President Juan Francisco Reyes Lopez pursuant to an order of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights as a protective measure against death threats in connection with legal proceedings against former military officers suspected of involvement in the 1990 Myrna Mack murder.

¶3. According to the President's spokesperson, the decision was part of a SAAS restructuring aimed at reallocating the institution's resources and resuming its original mandate. SAAS, upon abolishment of the Estado Mayor Presidencial (Presidential General Staff), was created in 2003 exclusively to provide security to the President, Vice President, their families, other high-ranking government officials, visiting foreign dignitaries, and presidential candidates. The President's spokesperson affirmed that the government will continue to comply with the order of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights to provide security to Mack and other human rights defenders, but will now provide that assistance through the police instead of the SAAS.

¶4. Mack characterized the decision as a "metida de pata" (screw-up), criticizing Colom for absolving himself from his responsibility for citizen security. In a press statement, the Myrna Mack Foundation expressed concern over statements made by Colom during an April 24 radio interview regarding withdrawal of SAAS security detail. He stated that he made the decision to put the PNC in charge of providing security for human rights defenders because he did not want to run the risk of being held responsible for any incident against those under SAAS protection. The Foundation criticized Colom for being more concerned about personal blame than possible harm to the protected individuals. It called on government authorities to collaborate on efforts to improve justice and security for all citizens.

¶5. Comment: The PNC Division of Personal Protection is not as highly trained or as effective as the SAAS in providing personal security; however, use of PNC agents in lieu of SAAS agents fulfills Guatemala's commitments to the Inter-American Court. While some civil society leaders suggest that the GOG singled out Mack for her public statements alleging GOG involvement in the recent murder of security advisor Victor

Rivera, others, including high-profile politicians, have also had their SAAS security details withdrawn.
Lindwall